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NESTING OF THE PINE SISKIN IN CALIFORNIA

BY H. W. CARRIGER AND J. R. PEMBERTON

DURING the months of April, May and June, of 1903 and 1904, the writers examined in San Mateo and San Francisco Counties some twenty-five sets of the eggs of the pine siskin (*Spinus pinus pinus*). Owing to the loss of Carriger's collection and notes in the San Francisco fire the number of sets taken is not exactly known, but approximately ten sets were taken. To the writers' knowledge these are the only authentic eggs of this bird ever taken in California and a short description of their taking may not be uninteresting to CONDOR readers.

The taking of a male siskin with testes fully developed on April 5, in Marin County, and the seeing of several pairs of birds in San Mateo County a few days later, led to the suspicion that the birds were nesting in the vicinity



TYPICAL NEST OF PINE SISKIN IN CYPRESS

of San Francisco. Diligent searching for the birds had its result, and on April 12, 1903, a small settlement of siskins was discovered in San Mateo County about a mile from San Francisco Bay. During the following two months every opportunity was taken to study this interesting bird. On April 12, 1903, two partially built nests were found by watching the birds carrying dry grass from the fields to the nests. On April 23, 1903, our first set of eggs was taken from nest number two. The nest was twelve feet from the ground, on the top of a long cypress limb which hung directly over a well-traveled road. There were four eggs in this set, and one would have thought them worth four hundred dollars from the care we took in packing them.

Of over forty nests found of the pine siskin, only one was not built in a cypress tree, and this one was in the very top of a fifty-foot eucalyptus. The nests were built in full-grown cypress trees planted in rows along roads or as division-lines between fields.

Nests were usually about twelve or fifteen feet from the ground, but notes show records of several forty feet up, and one fifty feet from the ground. The site

chosen was almost invariably about six or eight feet from the trunk of the tree and upon the top of a good, strong, leafy limb. The nests were well built, quite compact, and slightly larger than those of the green-backed goldfinch whose nesting the siskins' closely resembles. Nests were constructed of dry roots, grass and leaves from under the cypress trees, and were generally, tho not always, lined with considerable hair. The nests were always of the same material and could be distinguished at sight from nests of the western chipping sparrow, California purple finch, and willow goldfinch, all of which birds were sometimes nesting within a few yards of one another.

The nesting season runs from the second week of April to the first of July. The earliest set taken was on April 10, 1904, and the latest was a nest containing one fresh egg on June 10, 1906. This same nest contained two very young birds on June 24, two weeks later. A siskin was also seen carrying grass into a cypress



TYPICAL NESTING SITE OF PINE SISKIN
SAN MATEO COUNTY, CALIFORNIA

on June 24, and while this seems to point to nesting on into July, such instances are undoubtedly exceptional. The height of the nesting period, however, is from April 20 to May 10, and it was between these two dates in both years that the majority of nests were discovered.

The average set seems to be three eggs, but four is also a common number. Several sets of two eggs were taken in advanced stages of incubation, and also two sets of five, but these are rare.

The eggs are a pale greenish blue several shades lighter than eggs of *Astragalinus*, and are marked with chocolate spots and irregular blotches, with a number of pale lavender blotches which appear to be beneath the surface of the shell. Eggs vary from very nearly unmarked, to well marked about the larger end and sparingly over the whole surface. The average size of all eggs at hand is .63 by .48 inches.

San Francisco, California.